

tion that allows for rounds, choral structures, and the like. The Listening voice allows the introduction of external MIDI data to be taken into the *Koan* environment live from any external MIDI device. In this way, *Koan* can be used -- since it also outputs MIDI -- as a generative MIDI event processor as well as a musical tool, among other possibilities.

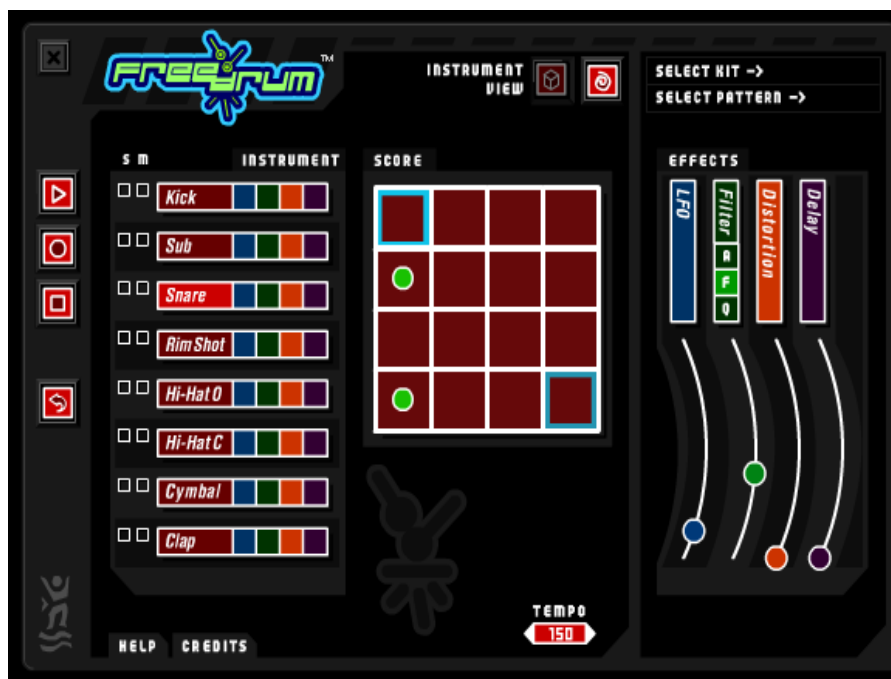
The third panel consists of the *Sseyo Koan Synth Engine*, which is quite unique to this application. The structure of the SKSE is similar to traditional modular synthesis in allowing the creation of synth modules that can be wired together using FLO's filters, particle systems, etc. The SKSE is actually a fully-featured modular soft synth that just happens to be part of the *Koan* system, allowing samples to be combined with envelopes from particle systems to create granular synthesis as well as the Buchla-esque patching-together of oscillators and filters to get some incredible retro sounds. Again, it's not overly pretty, but once you get the knack of the interface, the power of the system becomes evident.

As you may or may have not ascertained, the *Koan* music environment is a product that is in part a labor of love, but also a development tool for the creation of online content for Web and mobile applications. This was what took Sseyo's into its relationship with Tao and into the creation of its next-generation intent Sound System for mobile applications.

However, still contained within the *Koan* system is a full functionality for the creation of online content through audio 'vectors' for embedding within web pages. These small files, which are accessed through the *Koan* browser plugin, allow for the embedding of generative sound within the web environment. In addition, *Koan* also allows for full system level access to its API through Java, Javascript, and C++ objects on both the PC and Mac platforms. Due to this functionality, *Koan* was making content for clients in the UK in the 90s, passing on variables to Flash animations through Javascript and creating generative audiovisual pieces on the Net.

To go further into the possible applications within web and new media installations is outside the scope of this already very technical review, but it's my hope that you got an idea of the multifaceted possibilities of this tool. Although my assessment of *Koan* may verge on gushing its praises, I want to be clear about a few things. I reiterate that the tool itself is not pretty, but one of those with almost Baroque functionality that comes with an endless array of levers and gauges. It is a development tool, not a prosumer app. I had discussions with programmer Pete Cole about the proprietary nature of the *Koan* Music engine's equations, but this is a minor point compared to the number of parameters that the music engine does allow you to access. Due to Sseyo's concentration on the Tao intent Sound System, *Koan* has not had a major revision in over three years. All this being said, *Koan* is also one of the more overlooked options in the creation of generative music (or event processing) software. It's relatively inexpensive (\$199), has a great deal of flexibility and depth, and allows the creation of content across a wide variety of electronic media. It's not as flexible an environment as Max/MSP, but it's not intended for the same purposes either. Although I may make mention of some of *Koan*'s less attractive points such as its interface, I would metaphorically put them in the category of Cindy Crawford's mole, which is considered a beauty mark.

Ranking 4/5



*FreeDrum, a Koan - powered
Flash Applet by Andrew
Garton/ToySatellite.com*